

## [Biographies—J. J. Rogers]

Dup

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J.J. ROGERS

The earliest settler and one of the outstanding business men of the town, is J.J. Rogers of Des Moines, New Mexico. A self educated man, as he terms himself, coming here when Des Moines was only a station on the railroad, he perhaps has done more for the growth and development of the town than any other one man there.

Mr. Rogers, who was born northeast of Fort Worth, Texas, in September, 1866 — has lived a life enriched by a variety of experiences. At the age of five the family moved to Jack County, Texas, where they lived in a tent until the father could erect a log house. Even at this early age Mr. Rogers, who was the only boy in the family, helped his father look after their cattle. C18 - 6/5/41 - N. Mex.

It was during their stay in Jack County that Mr. Rogers had his most thrilling experience with the Indians, who frequently came into Jack County on raiding parties. On this trip (1873) they had stolen nearly all the horses in the neighborhood. The settlers had joined the soldiers and were in pursuit of the Indians, trying to regain their stolen stock before the Indians could get them onto their reservation. Mr. Rogers — who was just “Jimmy” then — was left at home with mother and two sisters. Early one morning as he was returning from taking the milk cows to pasture, he saw his mother run out into the yard and heard her screaming, “Run, Jimmy, run! Run, Jimmy, run!” He was use to his mother becoming excited over little things, and never paid much attention when he heard her calling then.

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He dismounted from his horse, and leaned down to put the hobbles on him; as he raised up a big Indian was reaching over the 2 horse and almost caught him by the shoulder. To use Mr. Rogers' own words "No one had to tell me to run then; I just flew. " Later when the men returned with the horses one of the horses had a very beautiful silver mounted bridle.

When Mr. Rogers was 14 years old his father died. The year following his death was a fine crop year, following three years drought. Mr. Rogers then took his mother and three sisters to Mineral Wells to live, and he went back to Weatherford, Texas, and freighted from there for three years to make a living for them. He then went back to McKinney, Texas, to live. Here he began working in a store and planned to make his life work.

Mr. Rogers declares he was eighteen years old before he knew that there was such a thing as a man "beating his debts". His father — as was customary with all ranchmen — paid his bills once a year. It was during his job in the store that he had his first experience of this kind. He had hired out for a month, and if, at the end of [this?] time he had given satisfactory service, he was to continue working. At the end of the month his employer asked him to take charge of the store; doing all the buying and selling. One day two well dressed men came to the store and wanted to open an account, which Mr. Rogers refused to do, but Mr. Pierce — the proprietor of the store — did; taking a mortgage on the team and buggy the men were driving, and duly recording the same at the court house. For several days the men bought big bills of goods — each time buying enough to run the ordinary ranch for three months. Then one Saurday Saturday they came in and again bought a large bill of goods; that night they left for the Indian Territory and was never seen nor heard from again.

After five years of working in this store Mr. Rogers decided to come further West; moving this time to Dalhart, Texas. Being "broke" when he arrived here, he hunted up an old friend who was working in a [?] supply house, and thro'ugh him got a job on the rip tracks. After working here for three months he obtained work in the supply department of a grocery store. As he was an experienced clerk he tried to get on in that line, but the

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owner of the store was afraid he could not handle the trade. His opportunity came to prove himself one day when the regular clerk was out, and two of the store's most important customers came in. Mr. Rogers, thro'ugh his natural tack and cleverness, sold each lady a large bill of groceries. The manager, who had been watching the sales, made him a regular clerk, and the ladies became his regular customers.

In May 1907, Mr. Rogers filed on a claim near Des Moines, New Mexico, which was then only a station on the Colorado and Southern railroad. In October of the same year he came to New Mexico with his intentions of opening a store for himself in the new settlement. His first work was that of hauling wood and water for the settlers; he then began erecting shacks as the people were coming into the new community faster than shelter could be provided for them. With in three months he had built seventy-five shacks, and has acquired the sobriquet of "The Shack Builder". He also began locating people from Texas and other parts of the country on homesteads around Des Moines for which he was paid five dollars per claim. This was the nucleus for the business he is still in, that of Realtor.

For the past sixteen years Mr. Rogers has held the position of United States Commssioner Commissioner ; his present and fourth term expiring July 16, 1938. He is also Justice of Peace of Des Moines, the only town in the United States under "Petticoat Government".

In June 1910, Mr. Rogers was married to Marie Record. This wedding took place on the very highest point on Sierra Grande Mountain, with all the principals mounted on horseback. The ceremony was witnessed 4 by every one in the community who could possibly reach the top to the mountain; some going on horseback, some walking, and others going in buggies or wagons as far as possible then climbing the remaining distance.

Mr. Rogers and his wife live on their ranch, a few miles from Des Moines, in the summer and make their home in town in the winter.

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He has watched the town grow from a little railroad station, whose only inhabitants were the station agent and his family, to one of the most prosperous towns in Union County; and has also watched its decline during the recent years of drought and depression; but through it all he has retained his jovial disposition and his faith in his town and fellow men. Such characters as Mr. Rogers, are the real back-bone of the country.

### SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Rogers, J.J. Interview to Emery, August 20, 1936, at Des Moines, New Mexico